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ABSTRACT

America's social order represents a history of conflict between the forces of unity and pluralism. The prevailing ideology of the evolving multi-group society has been assimilation or integration with the eventual loss of separate identity for component minority groups. Since the 1960s, however, separatism and individualism have become the most powerful sentiments expressed by minority groups. Although cultural pluralism promotes socioeconomic improvement (via legislation) and psychological gains for minority members, the problems of fragmentation and extreme competition between component minority groups could have negative consequences for society as a whole. Therefore, cultural pluralism seems to present as many problems to the society as assimilation and integration. (JCD)

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CULTURAL PLURALISM AND SOCIAL UNITY: History and Issues

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ABSTRACT

Cultural Pluralism and Social Unity: History and Issues

American society is the result of successive waves of newcomers superimposed on the original native population. The prevailing ideological framework for the evolving Anglo-dominated multigroup society has been assimilation, with the goal of eventual loss of separate identity for component groups. The competing ideology of cultural pluralism has strongly emerged since the 1960's. If a true cultural pluralism were possible, which seems unlikely, the socio-psychic gains for minority members could be great; however, difficulties of fragmentation and extreme competition between component groups could have negative consequences for the society as a whole.

Cultural Pluralism and Social Unity:

History and Issues

Introduction

The questions raised by the forces of cultural pluralism and social unity have never been more relevant than they are as we enter the final fifth of the twentieth century (or the final fiftieth of the second millenium). American society, having recently espoused the doctrine that "separate is inherently unequal" finds itself beset on all sides by demands for recognition of separate status from a wide variety of segments of the whole claiming that emphasis on separateness will, in fact, lead to greater equality. Ethnic and racial minority groups claim that equality has never been a remote possibility, much less working reality, for them and that the illusion that this is a feasible goal under existing, integrationist guidelines is unrealistic. Among the most significant questions then, to which a panel such as this must address itself is the central problem of how equal and integrated a stratified society can expect to become in a relatively short period of time, even with government support for equalization; and second, how great a sacrifice is involved in the loss of a sense of identity based on separatism which is entailed in the integration that may be produced.

America is a unique social order. Forces for unity and pluralism and for equality and discrimination, have coexisted rather uncomfortably from the beginning. Religious minorities, seeking shelter from coercive forces in their home settings, founded colonies marked by intolerance of divergent elements in their midst. The gradual institutionalization of slavery in the southern colonies added a new dimension to the character of the diversity of elements that was evolving, diversity with dehumanination. Contact with Native Americans, sometimes initially friendly but ultimately conflictive and even genocidal, added further complexity.

Historical Development

The nineteenth century was dynamic with respect to immigration and cataclysmic with regard to internal racial matters involving both Blacks and Indians. For the first four-fifths of the century peoples of Northern and Western Europe flooded in, seeking better lives, relief from famine and perceived contracting opportunities at home. On the domestic level, a war was fought to bring about emancipation of the slaves, and Indians were successfully relegated to reservations where nineteenth century "benign neglect" could clearly demonstrate what separate but unequal, carried to one kind of extreme, might produce.

Before leaving the question of the main thrust of the first eighty years of the nineteenth century, it is appropriate to note that the "integrationist" thrust vis à vis the Blacks, of the Reconstruction in the South rather quickly gave way to the de jure segregation (a different extreme form of separate and unequal) which set the stage for the battles of the twentieth century. As for the Indians, the well-intentioned Dawes Act of 1887, dedicated to the proposition that assimilation was the path of ultimate worth to Indians, merely resulted in the loss of great areas of reservation territory with virtually no integration of Indians into the mainstream of American life.

The first national attempt to terminate some aspects of diversity came in 1882, with the first national exclusionary immigration law. With this act came the clear assumption that Chinese were "unassimilable" and, hence, inferior and unwelcome.

This Act coincided with the initial surge of the "New Immigration" from Eastern, Central and Southern Europe which was to continue unabated until the first World War and the restrictive legislation that evolved in the 1920's. Thus a new cluster of white ethnic groups was superimposed on the earlier migrants from the British Isles, Germany, Sweden and Norway that had characterized the earlier decades of the nineteenth century.

While the question of religious diverstiy had expressed itself in the discrimination against the Irish in the early nineteenth century, the Catholicism of the new groups, combined with somewhat different physical attributes, plus other pronounced cultural differences, heightened a sense of threat in the dominant group. Further, the well-established Irish Catholic hierarchy in the United States became a force of sub-group forced assimilation in its own way.

Some reference must be made to the Jewish immigration to the United States. Jews were in the colonies from the beginning (Evans), making assimilationist adaptations in both the North and South. It was with the New immigration that the numbers became overwhelming and that other cultural differences began to result in distrust and discrimination from the larger host society.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, then, the pattern of a vast variety of heterogeneous elements, coexisting within the American setting, some such as Indian tribes having racial and cultural differences, some having only cultural variations and the Blacks having racial differences, but practicing a variant of the Anglo pattern, as received through disadvantaged status, was part of the context of the national life. The restrictive immigration laws of the third decade of the century clearly demonstrate the unease with its attendant ethnocentrism that was developing within the dominant group about the newcomers and older minorities.

The Spanish-speaking segment of the American mosaic also deserves some reference. The second largest minority segment in America (if language is used as the criterion) is by no means a monolithic group. Spanish-speaking categories have differing histories and patterns of immigration and adaptation. Those of the Mexican heritage have become part of the larger whole by conquest, ceding and both legal (restrictive since 1965) and illegal immigration. The largest

segment of Hispanics, they are also the most diverse in status and in class. The Puerto Rican segment, citizens since 1917, have migrated to the mainland northeast since 1946 in successive waves. Other groups from Central, South America and the Caribbeans add to this diverse group. Many are illegal aliens. Most recently the Cuban refugees from Cuba have come to the public consciousness. This is no monolithic group but a number of diverse groups sharing cultural similarities of language, religion, and other cultural patterns but little social cohesion.

Assimilation and Cultural Pluralism

During the twentieth century American society has had to evolve a set of norms for incorporating these diverse elements into American life. Underpinning the laws, customs and policies related to minority groups there have been ideology and value patterns. Two distinct ideologies have been developed in the course of the twentieth century. The first is the assimilationist ideology which held sway almost uncontested until the 1960's, though there were always some who felt otherwise. The main idea behind assimilation is that groups should become similar in cultural patterns and should interact within the social structures so that in time a fully integrated society would result. The "melting pot" form of this ideology implied that each group would contribute and that a new hybrid would develop (Zangwill). The more usual expectation was Anglo conformity (Coles; Gordon) whereby the minorities were expected to relinquish their own cultural patterns and become like the well-established dominant group. This cultural assimilation would in time lead to acceptance in the various institutions of the society with the result of structural assimilation or integration and ultimately intermarriage, or amalgamation (Gordon).

The Americanization programs in the early decades of the twentieth century typified the assimilation approach. Training in the English

language was the sine qua non of Americanization. Immigrants had to learn sufficient English to participate in the economic structure. Preparation for citizenship was also important. Children in American schools had to know English sufficiently to perform satisfactorily in school. Though a number of schools provided bilingual education in the 1920's (Fishman) the purpose was to facilitate assimilation and the transference to English. Many immigrants failed to teach their children the native tongue because they sensed that this would lead to retarded assimilation and to social problems for the young.

The competing though less prevalent ideology of cultural pluralism developed early in the twentieth century. Though Jane Addams noted that the crafts and products of immigrant cultures were valuable and worth preserving, it was Horace Kallen who articulated this goal for minorities. He seemed to imply that minorities should interact with the dominant host society in economic and political spheres, but lead separatist lives in other respects, but with the kind of equality that comes from equal power and prestige (Kallen). Cultural pluralism, as an ideology, has been based on the premise that the groups would not be ranked on a scale of superior to inferior. This ideal has been in effect for a long time in Switzerland which seems the only nation where it has effectively worked. While Sweden felt that this was the pattern during the nineteenth century when it controlled Norway, the Norwegians did not agree and sought diligently and successfully, though peacefully, to sever the tie and become independent (Jacobs). The situation of the French-speaking people of Quebec is another example. The Quebecois, do not feel that the separation is, in fact, free of discrimination and would prefer sovereignty. Examples, then, of true cultural pluralism are rare and seem to depend on a special set of historical circumstances. Peaceful coexistence of diverse groups, within a unified political

and economic structure, with true equality of the component groups does not seem to be an easy achievement. No one would claim true cultural pluralism in the Soviet Union despite the early efforts that were made to preserve the diverse languages and cultural heritages of the various soviets; monopoly of political and economic power fell into the hands of the few, and coercive acceptance of ideology has been part of reality.

In the United States the assimilationist perspective has dominated ethnic intergroup relations throughout the twentieth century until the recent past. Though Marcus Garvey, through flamboyance and charisma, put forth a separatist concept during the 1920's, his movement was shortlived. Other Black leaders and Black organizations until the 60's stressed the goal of an integrated, equal society. The main battles won by the NAACP through the litigation process were aimed at access to the structures of the society, economic, educational, political and social, on an equal-status basis. The Supreme Court decision of May 1954 (Brown vs. the School Board) culminated with the declaration the "separate is inherently unequal". The political activism of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., aimed at taking the battle out of the courtroom and into the public to promote awareness for legislative and executive action, was also aimed at an integrated society where minority members would participate on an equal footing leading to total integration.

One should take note of the fact that Blacks had been subjected to a form of segregation so involuntary, coercive and abrasive that revulsion against it and toward integration seemed the most desirable goal. There were, however, other ethnic groups who desired a degree of separation and who established ethnic enclaves which were viable though often unnoticed. Some of these groups were quietly in pursuit

of cultural pluralism. The number of foreign language newspapers in the country attests to this pluralism (Fishman).

Recent Patterns and Pressures

During the 1960's a new group of Black leaders began openly to espouse the goal of separation. Malcoln X, as spokesman for the Black Muslims, gave the pluralist perspective powerful expression. The Black power concept of Carmichael and Hamilton expressed separatism in a different way. It is ironic that while the sweeping Civil Rights legislation of the mid-sixties was in the process of being passed, the articulation of separation as a goal was taking hold. While it is true that laws do not bring immediate comprehensive change, there was provision for affirmative action to implement the new legislation and prior court decisions in the Civil Rights Act of 1965. Affirmative action is, by definition, integrationist in nature. In Alexander vs. Board of Education the Supreme Court directed that deliberate speed was over and affirmative action was to be enforced. Nonetheless, the separatist view of minority status began to be the "new look" in the statements of minority leaders.

Scholars had also begun to note the fact that the melting pot pattern was far from reality for all groups, if indeed for any. The concept of a triple melting pot, operating through intermarriage within broad religious categories was developed (Kennedy). Glazer and Moynihan, in studying ethnicity in New York City, pointed out that groups have different assimilation possibilities. Indeed, Park had noted years earlier that for Blacks in the United States the possibility of complete assimilation was remote in even the distant future; and Park was a cyclical theorist holding that assimilation is an inevitable ultimate consequence of inter-group contact (Park). As the conflict theory model became more academically competitive during the sixties ethnic identity came to be

viewed by some theorists as the most feasible assertion for greater participation in the society, and a revulsion against the conservative bias of assimilation began to take hold (Greely, Novak). More militant theorists (Blauner, Metzger) perceived the assimilation ideology supported by functional theorists to be a tool of the ruling class in justifying the internal colonization of oppressed minorities.

The question of just how much assimilation has, in fact, taken place, has not been answered with any degree of finality. Alba has noted that more assimilation, as measured by ~~interviewing~~ has occurred than one would infer from the current literature on the subject (Alba) Clearly, many individuals in various white ethnic groups have been upwardly mobile and have penetrated economic and ~~progressional~~ professional organizations. Japanese Americans are regarded by some as a textbook example of the American dream for an immigrant group (Kitano) on the way to assimilation. Within the Black minority the better educated, middle class segment has enlarged significantly under the pressure of civil rights legislation and affirmative action (Sowell, Wilson). How, then, does it happen that the disaffection with assimilation and integration has become so pronounced and what are some of the issues that the new emphasis on cultural pluralism raises?

Current Dilemmas: Results and Consequences

One factor in the heightened sense of failure of the assimilation approach has been the fact that the process actually takes considerably longer than members of a minority group have been led to expect or are willing to wait. Further, it is not a unilinear process, but a process that involves fits and starts. Hansen's idea that the third generation reverts to a reverence for ethnic heritage may simply be another way of saying that assimilation does not move along at an even, steady pace (Hansen). For many ethnic minorities, the fourth and fifth generations are yet to

be born, and the final outcome is ambiguous. For the Scotch, Irish, and German immigrants of the early decades of the nineteenth century, ethnicity seems almost to have vanished as an identificational reference point. Blacks and Hispanics, on the other hand, have become convinced that assimilation will never be a viable process for the large mass of group members and find the political clout that goes with a heightened sense of ethnicity a valuable tool in acquiring access to scarce social resources. Hence, the new emphasis.

An example can be presented based on the efforts to bring about a bilingual and bicultural amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, incorporated as Title VII in 1968. The goal of the members of Congress who passed the amendment was clearly to provide an avenue of assimilation to students who had a mother tongue other than English and to provide them with some knowledge of their cultural heritage. For Spanish-speaking minority members the pressure to gain support for this amendment and the results that were envisaged were clearly toward ... cultural pluralism. There was even a feeling expressed that Blacks could not preempt this particular gain. Bilingualism with the goal of learning English and becoming better assimilated was the goal of the law-makers; retaining the mother-tongue and acquiring a sense of cultural pride, with the goal of cultural pluralism was the thrust of the minority leaders and their proponents who testified (Hearings of House Subcommittee on Education). The announced intention of Mr. T.H. Bell, the new Secretary of Education, to scrap the Carter administrations proposals for federal participation in bilingual education reflects the absence of strong commitment in the new administration.

In the wake of the civil rights legislation of the 1960's with provisions affirmative action has come what one author has identified as a threat of the "Balkanizing of America" (Perlmutter). Groups seeking to qualify for funds have activated "ethnic identity" and assertions of

"oppression" to get a share of the pie.

> . . . A Polish organization surveyed the staffs of thirty senators from states with substantial Polish population, and found that of 853 staff members, only 17 were Poles, and most of them were women in lower-echelon jobs . . . An Asian group came up with the finding that there was only one Asian attorney for every 1,679 people in the San Francisco Bay area, though the area as whole boasts one attorney for every 250 people. . . . The Italian-American Legislators Caucus found the City University of New York guilty of discrimination since 25 percent of the student body was Italian-American while only 4.5 percent of the faculty was.

Perlmutter goes on to say:

> The net effect of such studies has been to increase greatly the level of rancor in the country, . . . The result has been a measurable rise in intergroup squabbling which has incidentally, all but dissolved whatever is left of the old coalition strategy for achieving social reform.

The accuracy of Perlmutter's assertion is found in the results of the November 4, 1980, election. The old Democratic Party coalition seems comatose if not dead.

What, then, are the issues related to the question of cultural pluralism and social unity? First, for minority groups and their members and second, for the society as a whole?

Issues

The question of which goal, assimilation and integration or cultural or social pluralism, should be pursued by minority groups is not an easy one to answer categorically. For those groups who have endured what may accurately be defined as oppression such as Blacks and Mexican Americans, the avenues of improved status have been filled with overwhelming impediments. The legal battles won on so many fronts by the NAACP have brought change, often impressive, which paves the way for future equalization in the society. These cases continue, as in the Steelworkers vs. Weber decision of 1979; yet other decisions, such as the Bakke decision, (Regents of University of California vs. Bakke, 1978) may represent a counter trend. The speed with which court decisions reach implementation

of mass proportions, however, is clearly limited. More than a quarter of a century after Brown vs. the School Board the majority of Black and Hispanic children remain in segregated schools. Further the resistance in the white sector to integration via busing (the only feasible way in most locales) is as strong as ever. Housing segregation is as pervasive as ever. For these minorities assimilation seems remote, a mirage, a promise the dominant group holds out to coopt and encircle while continuing to monopolize power, prestige and privilege. The size and despair of what is now called the Black Underclass undermines faith in the inevitable progress that assimilation proponents hold out. They feel deserted by partially assimilated, Middle Class Blacks (Wilson; Sowell).

But within a highly stratified society such as ours, how feasible is the possibility of true pluralism for these groups? Though many contend that the problem is one of class rather than race or ethnicity (Wilson, Sowell), the fact is that race or ethnicity has entered into the stratification system in such a pervasive way as to be a factor in its own right. While confrontation and conflict aimed at community control and separation with greater equality may seem to bring greater possibility for gains in the short run, it is doubtful that this would persist in the face of a white backlash truly dedicated to withholding the economic resources needed to build viable separate communities. President Reagan's administration and the new Congress do not appear to be generously disposed toward underwriting such patterns. Soul City's fate is an added recent deterrent.

The Bilingual and Bibultural amendment to the Education Act referred to above is an example of how confrontation maneuvers may bring about concessions from the dominant group. Yet this seeming gain is problematic. The funding for pilot programs was not sufficient for the task assigned and the assumption that the state and local governments will continue

these without continued pressure form the federal government seems unrealistic. The federal government is retreating on this issue. Again, the goal of bilingual education is differnetly perceived by dominant group and minorities; the former views bilingual education as a means to assimilation, the latter as a means to ethnic identity and pride. As a number of other, smaller groups, such as Greeks in Chicago, Arabic speakers in Detroit, feel that they too are entitled to funds for bilingual and bicultural education, the problems of distributing scarce resources multiply. The Supreme Court ruled in 1974 in Lau vs. Nicholas that special programs must be provided for minority children who are deficient in English. The implementation of this ruling will become more problematic as federal funding is withdrawn.

Conclusions

At the psycho-social level it is clear that assimilation has been difficult for minority group members. Assimilation as produced in the U.S. encourages minority people to become like the dominant group and prepare for full participation in all facet of social life, only to find rejection in many areas for ethnic reasons. This rejection and its resultant sense of categorical marginality is a cruel price to pay, and may explain the Hansen third-generation hypothesis. With cultural pluralism the reference group for minortiy members shifts back to the group of birth; the differences in religion, culture, values become sources of pride. This may be one of the best arguments favoring pluralism that can be put forth. If participation on an equal basis in economic and political spheres could become real, while interaction at the personal and expressive levels was tied to the ethnic group perhaps minority members would have the best of two worlds.

At the societal level the issues may be expressed in related but somewhat differents ways. Gunnar Myrdal noted almost forty years ago

that America faces a severe value dilemma with respect to the Black minority, namely the emphasis on the American Creed conflicting with the institutionalized racist ideology and its structural outgrowths. He clearly felt the solution to the dilemma to be the ultimate prevailing of the American Creed over racist ideology and a revision of the institutions of society to reflect this. The liberal philosophy that has operated throughout this century was geared to this view of the situation. The gains of the civil rights movement have been couched in the rhetoric of integration to an ideal of a society where race and ethnicity would at best be irrelevant in the daily life, and preferably would have ceased to exist as meaningful abstractions. Many old line liberals continue to wish to move in this direction, with government pressure for more opportunity, and with continued affirmative action implementing existing civil rights laws and court decisions. Some, however, have become disenchanted with this direction and consider affirmative action to be reverse discrimination (Glazer). To these the issue is that we are trying to integrate too fast, making race (or sex) the key criterion to access to privilege, at the expense of qualification.

To others, the integrationist-assimilationist ideology is unacceptable because it has worked too slowly and has reinforced the old power structure while appearing to promote change. Many scholars (Blauner, Metzer) are of this view, though their influence in government is practically nonexistent at this time. For this latter group the main thrust for the future should be continued conflict and confrontation in the hopes of establishing a pluralistic society where minorities have achieved much greater power, hence privilege and prestige.

It seem highly unlikely that true pluralism will be a possible pattern in the near future, with the stratification pattern which still operates providing the framework. Indeed, it seems more likely

that repressive measures setting back the limited integration progress of the mid-century are more likely to occur. Separated segments are sitting duck targets for scapegoating and aggression. With respect to the component groups of minorities and their interactions with each other, another problem looms. The potential for cleavages and fissures within the society is abundant enough without setting up a situation where the contest for scarce resources is tied to race or ethnicity. In the Ocean Hill-Brownsville dispute of 1968 we saw the latent conflict between Jews and Blacks emerge in a particularly threatening way (Glazer and Moynhan). In Miami in the summer of 1980 the potential conflict between Cubans and Blacks developed and may have been a factor in the Liberty City riot. Groups that are natural allies become potential opponents as "Balkanization" progresses. In-groups require out-groups.

For the minority member who finds psychic solace in the ethnic community the gains may be quite real. But a degree from a school such as D-Q University that teaches only the ethnic history and cultural values of the minority may easily disqualify a person to earn sufficient income to lead a secure life within the ethnic community.

Another latent problem of heightened ethnic consciousness involves possible dual citizenship or dual loyalty on the part of members. In the old assimalationist view citizenship in the U.S. meant a relinquishing of political bonds with the old country. The behavior of Jewish groups in the U.S. pressuring policy vis-a-vis Israel is an illustration of some unintended, perhaps negative, consequences of the new ethnic identity surge. There has even been a tendency to define a young American citizen serving in the Israeli army as a high calling rather than a questionable behavior. Ethnic pluralism as a pattern may have real consequences in the development of foreign policy which

could have deleterious effects. Incidentally, Arab Americans feel strongly that their ethnic heritage has been further devalued as a result of the Israeli situation.

Cultural pluralism seems to offer as thorny a road to the society as assimilation and integration. The potential for further fragmentation and future conflict may be more pronounced.

America has been a unique experiment from its beginning. Held together by an ideal value system, expressed in the Constitution and in other official documents, that affirms equality and freedom, it has offered hope and refuge to people of widely diverse origins. In reality it has fallen far short of the promised dream. At this crossroads of our history it would be tragic if we fail to find some shared basis for identification at the macro level while retaining real mutual respect for our various rich cultural heritages.

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